

News Schnell School shooting
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School counselor Myrna Harp never gives up



BEST OF THE BEST — Marina Village school counselor Myrna Harp was recently honored as "Educator of the Year" in the Rescue Union School District. Village Life photo by Pat Dollins

EL DORADO HILLS — When you meet Myrna Harp a well-circulated poster comes to mind.

The poster depicts a stork attempting to eat a frog, but the frog has his little green hands around the stork's throat, preventing the bird from swallowing. The caption underneath reads, "Never give up."

Harp, a Marina Village Middle School counselor, takes that approach with every student who walks through her door — that's more than half of Marina's 795 students — and she gives them all one-on-one, personal attention on top of coordinating the school's Where Everybody Belongs program (a sixth-grade orientation program that teams eighth-graders with new students to help them adjust and integrate), Club Live (a youth enrichment program) and the Student Success team, which addresses students' academic needs and attendance issues. She also goes to each classroom to talk about sexual harassment, bullying, high school graduation, studying and how she can help the students work through problems.

She let out a jovial laugh when asked, "And when do you sleep?"

The 54-year-old mother of three is clearly used to multi-tasking but she had no idea her tireless efforts would earn her "Educator of the Year" at Rescue Union School District's awards event last month.

"It was a total shock," she said. "The superintendent was up there talking away ... and I'm going 'Wait a minute.'"

Then Harp heard her name. "What?" she said, laughing.

This is the first time a school counselor has won the honor. District officials even changed the award's name from "Teacher of the Year" to "Educator of the Year."

“She is very deserving,” said Marina Village Principal Jeff Warshaw. “She provides a support system and valuable resources for our kids, some of whom, at this age, have a very challenging time.”

Harp said she knows all too well the challenges of growing up. “I had a hard time in school,” she confessed.

Now she turns those experiences and her training — she has a degree from Chapman University — into tools for her students. “I try to get rid of any barriers that prevent them from being successful,” she explained, adding that parental involvement is also very important.

Every student who received an “F” sees Harp for academic counseling, and she also works with students who have social or emotional issues. Several years back Harp recalled meeting a young man she called “explosive.”

“By the end of the year he was involved in Club Live and very involved in school,” she said. “He just needed someone to talk to.”

The boy is now a top rugby player for Ponderosa High School, Harp proudly noted.

School counseling is Harp’s second career. After raising her children — James Harp, 28; Tiffany Muise, 24; and Zabrina Prouty, 24 — she went back to school and took her first psychology course. “I said, ‘That’s it. I know what I’m doing.’” Harp, who lives in Diamond Springs with her husband Gary (married 36 years), has been a school counselor for 15 years, eight of those at Marina Village.

The joy of receiving the “Educator of the Year Award” was dampened last week when Harp lost one of her first second-career coworkers. She once shared an office with Schnell School Principal Sam LaCara when the two worked at Edwin Markham School on Placerville. LaCara was fatally shot in his office on Feb. 2. Harp joined other school counselors and responded to the crisis the best way they knew how — by listening.

“It was difficult,” she quietly said.

Listening and not judging are two of the best ways to help a child, Harp said, and the rewards are immeasurable. Harp said she relishes every “thank you” from her students and their parents, but she downplays her role in the healing process. “All I do is hand them the tools,” Harp said. “They do the work.”

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